

**POINT OF VIEW**

## What makes a company a great one?

**In these days when the technology gap is narrowing significantly, what makes a good company?**

Guy Goldstein

Even if the technologies offered are becoming closer and closer and are less of a dividing factor, the amount of research and development made is indeed a way to measure who is likely to propose the most advanced solutions. A way to secure the future and to put you in front of the pack. This will surely enable you to make progress faster and bring out new products before your competition does. I would favor those companies that invest in the future. A lot of smaller companies are just looking for loopholes to get as close as possible to the technology leader(s); some others are just copying.

There needs to be new news every time if you want to be in front of the radar screen. In many countries, you cannot raise your prices unless you have a new product, which means a product that gives significant benefits compared to the one it replaces.

**WHEN I USED TO BE DIRECTLY INVOLVED WITHIN THE COMPANY I WORKED FOR FOR MANY YEARS, THE PEOPLE FACTOR WAS VERY IMPORTANT.** A company is only as good as its people; their dedication is what often makes the difference. It is obvious that you will most likely buy, at equivalent technology, from people you feel most comfortable with. I believe it is still one of the major assets of a company; the way you deal with and relate to people is of the utmost importance. The importance of creating a partnership where complete trust is shared so that you only deal with the real issues and do not have to be bothered by side problems. People are a liquid asset. Get great people and don't worry if they are ambitious because they represent your future.

**I WILL TELL YOU A TRUE STORY THAT HAPPENED IN MY CAREER MAYBE SOME 15/16 YEARS AGO.** Late one Saturday evening I received a phone call from Atlanta from one of my friends and colleagues that one of our mills in upstate New York had a problem and some of their converting was idled by what seemed to be a technical problem, but the local service people had not really been able to resolve the issue. There were no spares available in the US, the mill needed to deliver an order to a major customer and the issue was "almost life threatening"; certainly the business was in trouble.

They sent me all the information I needed and I started calling the supplier. No luck! It was a long holiday weekend in Europe. None of my contacts answered, I was really out of luck ! I went to bed late and asked myself 'who else can I call?' I really did not sleep well. On Sunday morning I found the business card of a nice junior guy I had met recently who started in sales. I called him and said: "Davide, I need your help; it's urgent and important." He then tells me: "Guy, I'm on my honeymoon on the beach but I'll try. I'll call you back." Three quarters of an hour later I received a call: Davide found a colleague who is in the vicinity of the mill and who will try to find the spare electronic card even though the company is closed and only security is there.

Two hours later I received another call: "I am at Florence airport and I just handed over the spare to DHL; it should be delivered within 12 to 15 hours."

Sure enough in the middle of the following night, I got a call from upstate New York: converting just started up, thank you. I said "You need to thank all those guys in the Caribbean and Italy who went out of their way to help you."

**IF YOU CAN BUILD THIS TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP**, you don't have colleagues but you have friends and to me, this means a lot. This company will always be on my preferred list.

The spare parts issue is very important too, availability and quick service.

The need to have a 24x7x365 possibility of access on top of internet capability, the need to have someone at the other end of the line non-stop, round the clock, the whole year through, regardless of holidays or vacations.

Reasonable delivery assurance and being on time is important to everyone. Get inspired by the airlines, the insurance companies, the mobile operators... you call a single number and somebody answers.

In my case he or she may be in France, Morocco, Mauritius, Senegal... somewhere where they speak my native language and they are able to deal with what I believe is urgent. Have something like this in place.

A lot of people are putting a lot of importance on price when making a final purchasing decision, plus or minus 5% on a multi-million euro deal which is going to last 10 to 15 years is meaningless. Buying the best for your needs means taking into account the support you will get from and the longevity of the supplier. The minute price differential will be recovered a zillion times.

You should not overpay but when buying a car, you make a decision: you can choose a Ferrari or a Fiat, yet both are owned by the same holding company. There you are talking status, not reason. In making an investment you are only talking reason!

**RELIABILITY IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR.** You absolutely need the company you deal with to be able to meet your requests as they come up. You need equipment which evolves gradually, not equipment where components have been changed systematically from one model to another. Standardization is a big plus, it helps maintenance and service plus it makes training easier within a site or between different sites and even in different countries.

There are many good and serious companies, many are trying to achieve this status too, and the future belongs to those who invest in technology and people. These are the two components of success and certainly the deciding factor.